

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 SSM-03 ACDA-12 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /088 W
-----074213 011930Z /70

R 311630Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7397
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1798

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PLO, LE,IS
SUBJECT: PLO INTENTIONS

REF: DAMASCUS 1553

1. AS POINTED OUT IN REFTEL'S VERY USEFUL AND
TIMELY ANALYSIS OF PLO INTENTIONS, PALESTINIANS
APPARENTLY BELIEVE THEY DID VERY WELL AGAINST
IDF, AND THE MORALE OF FIGHTERS AND FATAH HAS CON-
SEQUENTLY IMPROVED. AT SAME TIME, ISRAELI INVASION
HAS RAISED TO PERHAPS UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS PLO'S
TRADITIONAL SUSPICION OF THE ARAB STATES AND CAUSED
PROBLEMS WITH ITS LEBANESE LEFTISTS ALLIES.

2. PLO HAS SHOWN VERY GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE
STEADFASTNESS AND CONFRONTATION FRONT. FALASTINE AL
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THAWRA STATED ON MARCH 20 THAT "THE SILENCE OVER THE
INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF THE SOUTH ON THE PART OF
THE STEADFASTNESS AND CONFRONTATION FRONT IN FACT
NULLIFIES THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THIS FRONT, FOR SOUTH
LEBANESE LIES IN THE VERY HEART OF THAT FRONT. . . "

3. IN MORE GENERAL TERMS, PLO HAS SHOWN THAT IT

BELIEVES THE ARAB STATES WERE UNWILLING TO HELP WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN. ACCORDING TO FALASTIN AL THAWRA, "WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK QUESTIONS WHEN WE HEAR NOTHING BUT WORDS AT A TIME WHEN WE NEED ARAB BULLETS, SOLDIERS, TANKS AND PLANES" (SEE BEIRUT 1519).

4. Wafa ON MARCH 29 CARRIED AS ITEM REPORTING REMARKS OF ABU ADIB, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL AND A MEMBER OF FATAH'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE. ACCORDING TO Wafa: "HE SAID THE OFFICIAL ARAB PARALYSIS DID NOT SURPRISE THE REVOLUTION. . . ON THE EFFECT OF THE CURENT ARAB POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE REVOLUTION, HE SAID THAT THE DETERIORATING ARAB POSITION MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR ISRAEL TO MANIPULATE ARAB SOLIDARITY AND HIT THE ARAB CONFRONTATION VANGUARD WITHOUT HAVING TO FEAR ARAB RETALIATION. HE ADDED: 'IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS SITUATION THAT WE WERE NOT SURPRISED WITH THE ARAB STAND.'"

5. ASIM QANSUH, REGIONAL SECRETARY OF THE PRO-SYRIAN BA'ATH PARTY IN LEBANON, TOLD EMBOFF ON MARCH 23 THAT FATAH REALIZED THAT ITS MARCH 11 TERRORIST ATTACK AND THE ISRAELI REPRISAL HAD SERIOUSLY WEAKENED THE PLO'S POSITION VIS-A-VIS SYRIA AND LEBANON. HE BELIEVED FATAH DID NOT WISH TO PROVOKE THESE STATES BY MORE FIGHTING IN THE SOUTH AT THE PRESENT TIME
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(SEE BEIRUT 1616).

6. IN ADDITION, THE ISRAELI INVASION HAS APPARENTLY CAUSED SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE PALESTINIANS AND THEIR LEBANESE LEFTIST ALLIES. AL MURABITUN OFFICIAL SAMIR SABBAGH IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF ON MARCH 23 INDICATED FOR THE FIRST TIME TO US DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE PLO (SEE BEIRUT 1594). PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS PULLED GUNS ON EACH OTHER IN A DISPUTE OVER WHETHER TO TURN OVER A BARRACKS TO FRENCH FORCES AT TYRE ON MARCH 24 (SEE BEIRUT 1631).

7. WE ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THE ISRAELI INVASION WILL IN ANY MEANINGFUL SENSE REDUCE FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT. WHILE EUPHORIA OF THE MEMENT MAY HAVE REDUCED IT TO SOME EXTENT, THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE HAS AN ALMOST UNBLEMISHED RECORD OF INTERNAL BICKERING REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES. A SENIOR FATAH OFFICIALLY RECENTLY COMMENTED IN PRIVATE THAT "THE PALESTINIANS ARE UNITED ONLY WHEN FIGHTING ISRAELIS." THE RESISTANCE IS LIKELY TO RETURN TO FORM.

8. PLO'S SUSPICIONS OF ITS ARAB ALLIER AND TROUBLES
WITH ITS LEBANESE LEFTIST FRIENDS MAY MAKE PALESTINIANS
BEHAVE WITH GREATER CAUTION ON SOUTH LEBANON FOR THE
TIME BEING. PLO WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY NOT, HOWEVER,
FORSEAR MILITARY OPERATIONS FROM LEBANON INTO ISRAEL,
AS LONG AS PLO BELIEVES DIPLOMATIC PROCESS UNLIKELY
TO RESULT IN FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN
STATE. Wafa ALSO QUOTED ABU ADIB AS SAYING: "WHAT
THE REVOLUTION WANTS IS THE CREATION OF A NORTHERN
FRONT CAPABLE OF SELF DEFENSE AND STEADFASTNESS SO
THAT THE COMMANDOS MAY CARRY OUT THEIR OPERATIONS IN THE
OCCUPIED TERRITORIES THROUGHOUT THIS FRONT."
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PALESTINIANS, POLITICAL SITUATION, DISSIDENT FACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT01798
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780142-0736
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978035/aaaaadza.tel
Line Count: 128
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: da897cc4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 DAMASCUS 1553
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3277292
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PLO INTENTIONS
TAGS: MPOL, LE, IS, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/da897cc4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014